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NOFORN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 06/16/2019
TAGS: PGOV PREL AF
SUBJECT: AFGHAN ELECTIONS: CHALLENGING THE PROCESS TO
DELIVER

REF: A. A) STATE 59361
 1B. B) KABUL 1493

Classified By: S/SRAP Richard C. Holbrooke for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

11. (S/NF) Thank you for your cable (ref b) setting out the actions being taken on the ground to deliver credible, secure and inclusive elections. It is our view that we must do more. Despite your best efforts, there remains an Afghan and international perception that the U.S. and most of the international community are supporting Karzai's candidacy. Unless Afghans find not only our words but our deeds credible, they will vote for the candidate they think will win and we support.

12. (S/NF) We need to do everything we can to rebalance a playing field increasingly viewed as tilted towards Karzai. Our policy must be to make the elections process as fair as possible, not defend the status quo.

13. (S/NF) Without credible elections the link between the government and the people will be broken. The U.S. would be supporting a regime without a popular mandate. Our European partners, resolve will further weaken. Iran's current debacle offers us an important lesson that must be avoided, but is not impossible, if there is a widespread perception of theft.

14. (C) The June 16 POTUS statement sets the strategic direction. What matters next are actions on the ground. The international community has failed to deliver adequate, timely, solutions to a range of issues. We need immediate policies, which have been delayed for too long. Please set out what your plans are to deliver immediate and concrete results on:

a) SBU) Access to transport for all candidates, including how we distinguish between Karzai the candidate and Karzai the president when we support his travel (this has been unresolved for months now) we need a conclusion);

b) (SBU) Adequate security for all candidates, including where candidates have legitimately judged security provision inadequate (we cannot risk a major incident due in part to our inattention to security issues);

c) (SBU) Media: gazetting of the media law, equal or

equitable access to the media for candidates, backing the Media Commission and international community monitoring of, and setting out when, the media broadcasts unfairly;

d) (SBU) Public debates / candidate platforms and higher media profiles for the candidates so they are better known;

e) (SBU) Regular polling: the IRI poll is a helpful start. Polling is one of the most powerful tools available) poll early; poll often and get the results out. We must have more polls;

f) (SBU) Minimizing fraud, including through scenario planning where it is likely to occur, including through mass voting by tribal elders and other leaders and what mitigating actions can be put in place;

g) (SBU) Observers at as many of the polling stations as possible: Tim Carney's group is doing great work in co-ordinating the observation missions, but how are we ensuring there is good coverage across the country?

h) (SBU) Monitoring adherence to the Presidential decree on non-interference;

i) (SBU) US, ISAF military and PRTs are briefed on the elections and are playing an active role in ensuring the impartiality of local government officials and security forces. Plus monitoring of any local media. When will civ-mil guidance issue? We need (at least) weekly, consolidated progress reports;

j) (SBU) We understand that the IEC has awarded a contract to use indelible ink: this is not acceptable in insecure areas, and will lead to intimidation of potential voters and possible mutilation of voters with purple-inked fingers. What are we doing to minimize the backlash? Are the use of UV stamps and scanners in the insecure areas viable?

¶5. (SBU) There will be associated costs with many of these ideas. While both transport and security, for example, for all candidates will not be cheap and will have opportunity costs, the relative costs set against the campaign are minimal. Let us know immediately if lack of funding is impeding progress.

¶6. (C) We want to underscore that a credible election is not incompatible with a Karzai win. But it is in his interests to win credibly, if he wins. You need to ensure that he realizes this.

¶7. (SBU) Grateful for initial answers to the above by our open of business tomorrow, Wednesday 17, to inform oral briefings at the highest levels tomorrow. You can send longer, fully-drafted answers to be received by our open of play Monday June 22. Point of contact for any questions is Jane Marriott (exception to the NOFORN) on 202 647 9419 / 202 390 0799 (cell).

CLINTON